

# Answering The Call

*A Memoir of Rowing on the  
Potomac and Muskingum Rivers*



BRENT HANEY

## ACCOLADES TO MY CREW

This book would have never made it to publishing without my incredible Editor, Ms. Jill McKellan, and awesome book designer, Anita Stumbo.

Thank you! Thank you very much! Your guidance through this incredible process and your unwavering support and patience during this majestic journey is greatly appreciated.

To Alex Rogers and Bedwick and Jones Printing for making the publishing of this book effortless and beautiful!

*If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.*

—PATRICK LENCIONI

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*To Christine, my soulmate, and love of my life,  
You complete me.*

*To, LB, Grier and Blaire,  
I am so proud of each one of you.  
Remember ... Never, Never, Never Give In.*

*To Henry and Dempsey,  
Embrace life, find your voice, and never be afraid to fail.*

# To An Oarsman

Have you heard the old call that comes to us all  
To get out in the fields and the air;  
To shove into a heap the letters that keep  
You chained fast to your desk and your chair?

Do you know the delight of a chill moonlit night,  
As your paddle flashes and gleams,  
And you see the big moon rising up o'er the gloom  
Of the pines, where your camp fire beams?

Have you set decoys, to learn all the joys  
Of the whirl and the incoming swing  
Of the blue-bills or teal as you see them to wheel  
And come in with dropped foot and set wing?

Have you straightened your kinks on an eighteen-hole links,  
Do you know the champagne of a drive  
That lifts the ball true, a white speck in the blue,  
That rises, then carries, then drives?

If you've answered the call, you've perhaps tried them all,  
And others besides, for there's more;  
But tell me, my friend, 'ere I come to the end,  
Have you pulled out your heart at an oar?

Have you sat at the line, with cold chills down your spine,  
Just before a hard race had begun,  
When each moment intense seems a year of suspense  
While you watch for the flash of the gun?

Have you seen your own sweep, as you swing, seem to creep  
Past the boat that's not ten yards away,  
While you tighten your grip, as the oars flash and rip  
With a swirl through the water and spray —

And your eyes sting with sweat, and you fight hard to get  
Your next breath, and your tongue's like a bone;  
Have you given her ten then done it again,  
When you're rowing on pure nerve alone?

Have you dropped with the gun, just knowing you've won,  
While you grin to yourself if you can?  
If you have, here's my hand, for it takes "guts" and sand;  
It's a game that was built for a man.

—Canadian Association of Amateur Oarsman, date and author unknown

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# Preface

**I**N 1968, I was a pudgy 8th grader, living in Alexandria, Virginia, who loved to play baseball on my Little League team. Those summer days included hanging with my friends at our apartment pool at Seminary Hills, followed by heading over to the Minnie Howard Middle School field for baseball practice. I have to admit, I was so proud of my AB&W Transit uniform. My first real uniform, it was the same wool-like quality that my Washington Senators were wearing. I was part of a team and I loved the practices as much as the games themselves.

On game day, it was exciting to arrive at the field and watch the earlier game before it was our turn to take the field. The “cool” thing was to wear our Bass Weejuns and keep them on while we were watching the undercard in the stands. Of course, our cleats were right beside us and never left our sights. Once we were in the dugout, we switched into our cleats and found a safe shelter for the loafers. Life was easy and carefree; a major decision back then was whether or not to put the penny in the loafer; I opted not to.

Mr. Larrick was our coach and a great guy. He also owned the local sporting goods store in town. Back in the '60s there was no Dick's Sporting Goods or Athletic Shoe Factory or Nike outlet, just local merchants who carried everything from baseball gloves to bats, footballs, basketballs, sneakers, and cleats.

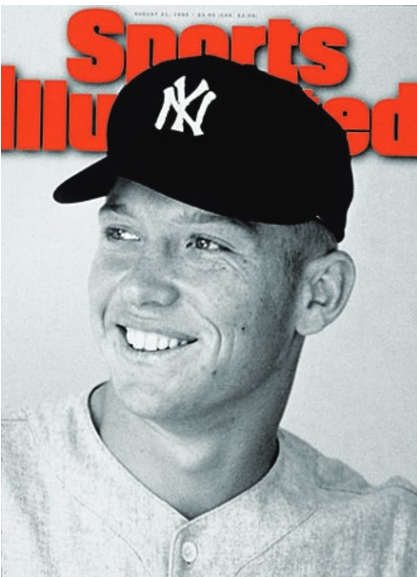
In some ways, the baseball field was my home away from home. It's with great fondness that I recall those times when Mr. Larrick would bring the store's pitching machine for batting practice. I'd take as many attempts as I could in the cage, he had to pull me out to let my other teammates have their practice.

Like most American boys those days, I loved everything about Mickey Mantle and wanted to emulate him. The way he ran, even when he was injured and that classic batting style was the envy of any kid playing ball those days; he was a switch hitter and had a powerful swing from either side of the plate.

While Mickey was by far my favorite player, I loved Brooks Robison's batting



Alexandria, Virginia,  
Little League All Stars 1966



The cover of *Sports Illustrated*  
when Mickey died in 1995

stance more than any other one out there. He was a righty and when he was preparing for the pitch, he would always hold his bat up high with his right arm, then bring his left arm up to meet it. When I came to bat, I did my best to set up just like him, right down to the hand grip.

It really was such a wonderful time; memories were being made and experiences lived. Those were the days when World Series games were played in the daytime; we were able to come back from school and catch the last couple of innings—more often than not I could watch my Yankee heroes try to continue the

dynasty they created in the 1950s. The funny thing was that my friends and I weren't playing the game thinking it might be a "hook" to get us into college. We just lived in the moment and enjoyed the rewards of being a part of it. Baseball was my passion and my world. Luckily, I had supportive parents; it was easy to get to practices and either mom or dad would be there to pick me up at the end of them.

But that started to change. In the early spring of 1968, I was listening to the morning announcements at George Mason Middle School. They were mostly dull but on this particular day, something caught my attention. There was going to be an informational meeting about rowing at Francis C. Hammond High School that afternoon and 8th graders were invited! A couple of us looked at each other and jumped on the opportunity to miss a class. At the time that was the best part of it and honestly, I had no idea what rowing was about but, for whatever reason, I signed up for the "learn to row" program. That night I told my dad about it and said that we needed to go to the boathouse on Saturday morning to fill out some information and purchase team sweats.

On that day in early April, I began rowing on the Potomac River at the base of King Street in the Old Towne section of the city. As I stood in line with my dad finalizing some of the details, he gave me perhaps the best life wisdom I've ever received. Dad said, "You know, if I buy these sweats for you, then I expect you to stick it out for the season." Funny thing, I remember his words but not my response. I doubt I thought much about it. What I do know is that during some of those first one mile runs when I was so far behind the rest of the beginners, I probably felt like calling it quits and not going back the next day. Thankfully, I did go back.

Not long after that I gave up baseball and focused on getting better at rowing. One meeting to skip a class changed the trajectory of my early life. In hindsight it was the first of many wonderful unplanned events in my life.

## **In These Pages**

This book is about my rowing experiences and the incredible people that I met along the way. Included are my relationships with my coaches, my teammates, and even competitors. But the genesis of this book is to write about the incredible men who came well before my time and established this great sport in Alexandria, Virginia, and Marietta, Ohio. More specifically, it was heartbreaking to see that when I went onto the Alexandria High School rowing website, the history of the program was nowhere to be seen. So, it will be a little history and hopefully some interesting stories about my time as a rower.

It was pure luck that I was in the right place at the right time to become part of such a well-funded public high school rowing program in which the cost to participate for me and my parents was nominal. This was due to the tireless work of rowing leadership and the creation of the “Alexandria Crew Boosters,” which were primarily funded by rowing parents and the Alexandria, Virginia, community. The programs that I will write about would not have been able to sustain themselves without the support of universities rowing like the Naval Academy and the University of Pennsylvania to name two, who passed down rowing shells, barges, oars, launches and training advice to the start-up programs.

Recently, many of my rowing contemporaries (meaning they rowed the same time as me, not that I was the same caliber oarsman as them) started self-publishing books on their rowing experiences. My high school stroke, Fred Borchelt published *Power 10: An Olympian Shares 10 Ways to Improve Your Rowing*. There was a book written by Rich Reinhart entitled *Men of Kent*, and recently Hovey Kemp, along with his son, published *The Hammers*, a book about his time as a rower at Harvard. It was when I was reading Hovey’s book that I got excited to write my own memoir. I wrote to Hovey to let him know of my plans and he had encouraged me to go for it. When we talked on the phone, he said there would be some setbacks and writing blocks. ... Admittedly, that gave me a pause. If a guy who went to Harvard undergraduate and then Georgetown Law had challenges, I couldn’t help but wonder how a guy that went to Marietta would be able to write and have a product similar to his. Hovey’s words were prophetic, as I was in the middle of writing, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to take a pause writing to take care of my health. Luckily, things worked out and was able to get back to telling my story.

Here’s my attempt at creating something informative and compelling for you. I hope you enjoy the book as much as I have had the opportunity to write it.